

A

GENERAL VIEW

OF THE

AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE,

DEMONSTRATING ITS

INJUSTICE AND IMPOLICY:

WITH HINTS TOWARDS A

BILL FOR ITS ABOLITION.



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TO THE
RIGHT HONOURABLE
CHARLES WOLFRAN CORNWALL,
S P E A K E R,

AND THE REST OF THE MEMBERS
OF THE
BRITISH HOUSE OF COMMONS,

WITH A FULL RELIANCE
ON THEIR
ATTENTION TO THE INTERESTS OF HUMANITY,
AND THE TRUE HONOUR AND PROSPERITY
OF THEIR COUNTRY,
THE FOLLOWING PAGES
ARE MOST RESPECTFULLY INSCRIBED.

SLAVERY is so vile and miserable an Estate of Man, and so directly opposite to the generous Temper and Courage of our Nation, that it is hardly to be conceived that an Englishman, much less a Gentleman, should plead for it.

Locke on Government, B. L.

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GENERAL VIEW
OF THE
AFRICAN SLAVE-TRADE.

THE trade carried on for slaves to the coast of Africa, for the purpose of supplying our West Indian Islands, may be considered in two principal points of view, viz.

I. WITH RESPECT TO ITS JUSTICE OR INIQUITY.

II. WITH RESPECT TO ITS POLITICAL ADVANTAGES, OR DISADVANTAGES TO THIS COUNTRY.

I.

ON THE INIQUITY OF THE SLAVE-TRADE.

The wickedness and injustice of this trade will evidently appear from the consideration of the following maxims, which are of universal import, and have been assented to by all rational men in all ages.

1st. All men have by nature, an equal right to the enjoyment of personal liberty and security.

2d. No man can be deprived of this right, unless it be forfeited by offences against that society to which he has positively or virtually acceded.

3d. No title to the perpetual servitude of another can be supported by purchase; for the origin being unjust, the right cannot be validated by transfer.

Such are the first laws of society, as ordained by God, and collected from the nature of man; the violation of which places the

the offender in the light of a criminal, and gives to the oppressed the right of ultimate resistance *.

The slave-trade to the coast of Africa, is a direct infringement of these laws; and besides the immediate offence of depriving an individual of his natural and unalienable rights, includes and involves in it the following violations of moral and political duties :

1. The murder of the slaves, by improper treatment, change of climate, extreme labour, or wanton cruelty.
2. A perpetual fraud of the whole labour of life.
3. A deprivation of the pleasures of domestic intercourse, thereby counteracting,

* For wherever any two men are, who have no standing rule, and common judge to appeal to on earth for the determination of controversies of right betwixt them, *there they are still in the state of nature.*

Locke on Civ. Gov. c. 7, sec. 91.

as much as possible, the natural propensity to the propagation of the species.

4. The imposition of severe and frequent punishments, even to dismemberment and mutilation, under laws to which the slave never assented ; and for nominal crimes of which, from the nature of his situation, he cannot be guilty ; his slavery being involuntary, and there being no laws in common between him and his master.

If, from considering the nature of the crime, we look at the extent to which it has been carried, we shall find that on the lowest computation 80,000 men are annually destroyed in the West Indian Islands, as will appear by attending to the following facts :

1. The human kind have a tendency to increase in population, when tolerably accommodated with the necessaries of life.

2. The negroes are remarkably prolific in

in their own country, as is evident from the numbers continually drawn from thence by the slave-trade.

3. It requires annually a supply of 80,000 negroes in the West Indian settlements, to keep up the numbers requisite for cultivation of the land.

From which premises it follows, that instead of increasing in number, as would be the case under tolerable advantages, 80,000 negroes annually are unnaturally and prematurely deprived of existence.

In order to procure 80,000 slaves in the West Indian Islands, upwards of 100,000 are yearly exported from Africa, of whom between 20 and 30,000 generally die in the passage.

From the means used in procuring slaves, it is certain that the procuring 100,000 negroes is attended, on the coast of Africa, with an immense destruction of the human species.

In the sight of God, and in the judgment of dispassionate reason, these crimes are all chargeable upon the practisers and abettors of the African slave-trade.

In justice however to such persons as have been engaged in this traffic, it must be acknowledged, that the criminality of it ought not to be imputed exclusively to any particular body of men ; but ought to be considered as affecting at the same time, the government which has tolerated and approved such trade, and the nation which has so long silently acquiesced under it. To endeavour to throw the reproach of national misconduct upon those individuals, who, from a variety of circumstances, and perhaps without peculiar depravity, may have been induced to become the more immediate instruments of it, seems therefore to be not only illiberal, but unjust.

I.

ON THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE SLAVE-TRADE, POLITICALLY CONSIDERED.

The prosperity of a nation consists :

- I. *In the strength and resources of the state.*
- II *In the opulence and happiness of individuals.*

I.

The strength of a state depends :

- I. *On the number and courage of its inhabitants.*
- II. *On the flourishing state of its manufactures, commerce, and agriculture.*
- III. *On the amount of its revenues.*

It will be proper then to consider how far these requisites are affected by the African trade.

I. It

I. It is a fact which can admit of no dispute, that the number of inhabitants of this country has been considerably diminished by the slave-trade, which occasions a certain annual loss of 1000 or 1500 seamen—a class of men who have been always regarded as the bulwark of the state.

The loss of 20 or 30,000 men in a period of twenty years, including the loss of their probable descendants, makes a considerable difference in the population of these kingdoms.

For the loss of these lives, the only compensation that it is pretended we obtain is merely pecuniary; which can no more repay a state for the loss of its inhabitants, than it can a man for the loss of his limbs.

II. 1. To the agriculture of this country the slave-trade has no immediate relation

—with its manufactures and commerce it is intimately connected.

2. The advantages derived from the slave-trade to the manufactures of this country, arise either, from the consumption of such goods as are bartered away on the coast of Africa ; or of such as are sent out as necessaries for the slaves in the West Indian Islands.

From an inquiry into the nature of the goods manufactured for the coast-trade, &c. it will appear,

That the business of providing goods for the African market is in the hands of a few manufacturers only.

That a considerable part of the goods are coarse, or nearly unwrought ; and therefore cannot possibly employ a great number of hands.

That a large proportion of these goods are disposed of in the natural trade of the country, for ivory, gold, &c.

The exportation of necessaries to the West Indian Islands, would certainly continue in whatever manner they were to be cultivated.

The extent and fertility of Africa leaves no room to doubt, that an exchange of European commodities, and particularly of English manufactures, for the productions of that country, under the encouragement and protection of the legislature, would, in a short time, not only open a new source of wealth to this nation, from the value and utility of the articles to be imported ; but would also occasion a far greater export of manufactures, and those of a finer and more profitable kind than can ever be disposed of in the traffic of the human species.

The

3. The advantages derived from the slave-trade to the commerce of this country, consist in the exportation to Africa of goods imported into England from other parts ; in the employment of our vessels and mariners, and in the importation of the productions of the West Indian Islands.

1. With respect to the exportation of East Indian and other foreign commodities to the coast of Africa, it is certain the demand for them in Africa will not diminish in consequence of the abolition of the slave-trade. The only difference will be, that instead of repaying us with slaves, they will furnish us in return with the natural productions of that unexplored country, which, as far as they are known, are of the most valuable kind, and may be obtained on the most reasonable terms.

The prohibition of the slave-trade will neither diminish the shipping employed

in the West Indian trade, nor in any degree prove injurious to the British plantations ; for the slave-trade at this time is not rendered necessary by any unavoidable and irremediable circumstances ; but owes its existence and support to the ill-judged parsimony, folly, and wickedness of the planter ; who, under the certainty that he can, at pleasure, supply himself with slaves from a fresh cargo, sacrifices those on hand, through a principle of mistaken avarice ; and instead of encouraging their propagation, holds it to be, on the whole, a matter of prudence to wear out and exhaust a slave in five or six years. The slave-trade is therefore not founded even in political necessity, but on an abuse *, which

* The number of negroes that die exceeds the number born in most, if not in all islands, so that an annual supply from the coast of Guinea is necessary to keep up their quota.—Mr. Stoke's View of the Constitution of the British Colonies, p. 414.

calls aloud for redress : and the introduction of humane restrictions, and reasonable laws into the West India Islands, as it will, on the one hand, contribute to the happiness and population of the negroes ; so, on the other, it will immediately diminish, and, in a short time, so far destroy the pretended necessity of the slave-trade, as to make its total abolition a matter of indifference both to the slave-merchant and the planter.

It is well known, that a slave bred on the plantation is, when arrived at maturity, of double the value of an imported slave ; and happy is it for the cause of truth, that the possibility of a plantation supplying itself with slaves does not depend on conjecture. Under a kind and judicious master this has already frequently happened, and an instance may be ad-

duced of a planter who doubled the number of his slaves in the space of 14 years, on the same estate, by propagation only *.

III. The revenue of this country is greatly augmented by the importation of various articles of merchandize from the British plantations : but as the total prohibition of the slave-trade, under proper cautions, will by no means diminish the productions of those plantations ; so the revenue will remain unimpaired : besides which, it may probably acquire a very important addition, from the establishment of an im-

* Governor Moultrie, late of East Florida, on one of whose plantations in the Bahama Islands, is now living a negro woman, from whom are derived forty descendants. These slaves were removed to the Bahamas from East Florida, on the cession of that province to the crown of Spain.

Quere. Would not the apprehensions of insurrection be much abated, if the plantations were cultivated by slaves born on the Island ?

mediate

mediate trade between the coast of Africa and this country; whose returns will be very expeditious, and whose commodities will in time bear the imposition of a considerable duty: whereas the export of slaves from Africa, and the time employed by our shipping in the middle passage, is not attended with the least advantage to the revenue of Great Britain.

II.

The prosperity of a nation also depends on the opulence of the individuals who compose it.

It will therefore be proper to consider, whether the balance of the African slave-trade has, upon the whole, been in favour of the general body of British merchants; and whether it be now carried on with the same advantages it has formerly been.

It would be absurd to suppose, that a trade which has existed upwards of two centuries should not, upon the whole, have been advantageous to the persons concerned in it ;—for otherwise, it would long ago have been abandoned, there being no inducement but that of profit, which could have given it a preference to any other kind of merchandize. But it may not follow from thence, that it is now a beneficial branch of traffic ; and the very circumstance of its having been formerly productive of gain, may perhaps be an inducement to the continuation of it, even when it has ceased to be so.

That there is some probability this is the case, may be inferred from the following circumstances :

Forty or fifty years ago, the purchase of a slave on the coast of Africa did not, on an

average, amount to half the sum now paid for such slave ; the competition between different adventurers having in this course of time raised the price : whereas the value of a slave in the West Indies is, at the present time, very little more than it was when such slave cost only half the sum he now costs on the coast of Africa.

The long dates at which bills are usually drawn in the West Indies for payment of slaves, is another heavy deduction from the profits of the slave-merchant, as well as a very important addition to his risque. These bills are frequently drawn at one, two, and even three years date ; at the end of which time it is by no means unusual for them to be returned to the West Indies for want of payment.

If to these circumstances we add the frequency of insurrections, the certainty of loss by sickness, and the large sums paid as premiums of insurance, we shall have reason perhaps to conclude, that the slave-trade is not now so productive of private wealth, as its advocates would willingly induce us to believe.

It may also be proper to remark, that from the most authentic information the author has been enabled to obtain from many respectable inhabitants of the town of Liverpool (to which town his inquiry was more particularly directed, as it has, for some time past, sent out more vessels in the slave-trade than all the rest of the kingdom), it appears, that out of thirty mercantile houses, or companies, which have carried on nearly the whole of this

this trade since the year 1773, not less than twelve have actually become bankrupts : of the remainder many are supposed to have sustained considerable losses, whilst the number of those who are known to have enriched themselves by it is restricted to a narrow compass. In this estimate we must, however, except the masters of vessels in the slave-trade, whose profits chiefly arise from a commission on the purchase, and another on the sale of their cargo, and to whom the slave-trade has therefore been uniformly advantageous.

Instances have, of late years, occurred of British merchants entering into contract with other countries, to supply their plantations with slaves ; and many voyages have been made in English vessels, and with English seamen, for that purpose—a circumstance

circumstance of which it is difficult to say, whether it is more disgraceful to the national character, more injurious to the state, or more ruinous to the individuals who have attempted it. That the British nation should be branded in future times as procurers of slaves for all Europe, is a matter of real concern to every person who feels himself interested in the honour of his country—That the lives of a considerable number of British seamen should be annually sacrificed, in order to save those of such neighbouring states, as we have been long accustomed to call our natural enemies, and to enable them to cultivate their American settlements, is an abuse which ought not to have been so long tolerated by the government of this country. With respect to the private advantages which have been reaped from these foreign engagements,

ments, the recent fate of an eminent adventurer, who is generally allowed to be possessed of extraordinary mercantile talents ; and the complaints of those industrious tradesmen who now, *for the third time*, lament the uncertain nature of the slave-trade, will be the most striking comment.

C O N C L U S I O N.

From the foregoing remarks, it is then evident that the slave-trade is not only a continual offence against the laws of God, involving the daily commission of such crimes as cannot fail to awaken his just displeasure, and to excite the detestation and abhorrence of all good men ; but that it is also detrimental to the state in depriving it annually of a very considerable number of its most valuable subjects ; that it is unnecessary to the support of the manufactures,

factures, commerce, and revenue of this country, or to the proper cultivation of our American Islands ; and finally, that it is at present by no means so productive of wealth to the individuals concerned in it, as has been usually imagined.

HINTS TOWARDS A BILL
 FOR ABOLISHING THE TRADE FOR SLAVES
 TO THE COAST OF AFRICA.

Preliminary Remarks.

IT has been already demonstrated, that the slave-trade is not founded on necessity, but on an abuse ; and that the annual demand for slaves is principally occasioned by the improvident destruction of them, and the obstacles to propagation in the West Indian Islands.

1. The first regulations, therefore, ought to have regard to the present condition of slaves in the West Indies ; to improve their personal rights, so far as may be done without too great a relaxation of discipline ; and to enable them to marry and

and propagate, by granting extraordinary privileges to such as bring up a certain number of legitimate children *.

2. But notwithstanding these regulations are no less dictated by prudence, than by justice, it is much to be feared that an act merely declaratory will be insufficient to bring about so desirable a reform: and it will, therefore, be necessary to enforce the observance of these regulations, by a gradual restriction of the slave-trade. This

* "The fundamental proposition upon the subject of population, which must guide every measure to improve it, and from which every conclusion concerning it may be deduced, is this: Wherever the commerce between the sexes is regulated by marriage, and a provision for that mode of subsistence, to which such class of the community is accustomed, can be procured with ease and certainty, there the numbers of the people will increase; and the rapidity, as well as the extent of the increase, will be proportioned to the degree in which these causes exist."

Paley's Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy. 592.

restriction

restriction may be effected in two ways—first by limiting the number to be imported—secondly, by charging such a duty upon slaves imported into the settlements as will make it more advisable for the planter to breed young slaves on his estate than purchase fresh ones. Of these measures the latter, for many reasons, seems to be the most advisable.

3. The employment of our shipping and mercantile capitals, and the improvement of the public revenue, is to be effected by a more extensive trade to Africa, for the commodities of that country, than has hitherto been carried on.

4. To which may be added, that the practice of supplying foreign nations with slaves, at the expence of the lives of British seamen, and the temporary loss of the shipping of this country, ought to be prohibited in the most effectual manner.

H I N T S, &c.

Personal Rights.

TO establish in every Colony, a Court of Judicature, which shall be both of a criminal and civil nature, to be composed of three judges, appointed by the crown, none of whom shall be either merchants or planters.

The Court, on complaint, to decide on the corporal punishments of the Slaves, and on the fines and penalties of the planters, and other free men, without the intervention of a jury; but not to condemn any person to death, or imprison a free man, without a jury, according to the formalities of the English law; and no person to be capitally executed, without the warrant of the Governor for the time being.

Wilful murder of a slave, by a free man, to be punished with death.

The testimony of slaves to be evidence in capital crimes, and the jury to judge of its credibility.

Maiming, striking, whipping, or otherwise abusing a slave, without the determination of the Court, punishable by fine and imprisonment.

The murder of a *free man* by a slave, to be punished with death, by hanging: all torture, and lingering and painful modes of putting criminals to death, to be abolished.

Theft in a slave to be punished by whipping, at the discretion of the Court.

Hours of labour to be fixed according to the circumstances of different colonies, and the necessities of particular seasons.

Every planter to provide his slaves with a reasonable allowance of provision, and clothing; to be regulated by the Court as often as occasion requires.

Saturday afternoon, and Sunday, to be entirely at the slaves disposal.

Divine service to be performed for such of the slaves as are willing to attend, at least once every Lord's day.

Encouragement of Propagation.

Every man and woman slave, when married, to have a stipulated portion of

land assigned to their sole use, under the sanction of the Court.

A slave being the father of a child capable of working, or performing a task, to have half another day in the week allowed ; and an additional half day to be allowed for every child so capable of working.

No woman slave to be compelled to work for a reasonable time before and after delivery.

Every mother to be allowed one hour from labour each day, in respect of every child ; and when such children are capable of working, to have the same exemption from weekly labour as the father.

The father and mother of seven children, or upwards, capable of work, to be

totally exempt from labour, and to be allowed a rateable quota of provisions and necessaries with the other slaves.

Every slave to be allowed to work or hire out himself on the days of exemption, and to acquire and retain property independent of his master ; and also to have the privilege of purchasing his freedom gradually, paying one-sixth of his original cost for one day in each week ; or the whole cost for his full emancipation.

Sick and aged.

Proper hospitals to be established in every colony, for sick and aged slaves ; to be supported by a rateable tax on the planters, and by voluntary contributions.

Restricting Duties on Importation.

From the 1st of January, 1789, to impose a duty of five pounds upon every slave

slave imported into any of the British settlements.

From the 1st of January, 1794, to raise the duty to 10l. and from the 1st of January, 1800, entirely to prohibit the importation.

Bounties on Trade to Africa.

Bounties for a limited time to be allowed, according to the tonnage, to vessels trading to Africa for wood, gums, ivory, and other merchandize; to be paid out of the duties arising from the importation of slaves in the West Indies.

Number of Slaves to be proportioned to the Vessel, and Prohibition of supplying Foreigners.

No British vessel to be allowed to clear out on a slaving voyage, to the coast of Africa, unless security by bond, in a sufficient

sufficient penalty, be given before her departure, that she shall not take on board more than a certain number of slaves, to be proportioned to the burthen of the vessel ; and that she shall deliver the same in some or one of the British plantations. Certificates of such delivery to be produced before the bond be cancelled.

The slaves in each colony to be registered, and not to be sold out of the colony without a bond being given for delivery of the slave in some other British settlement : such bond not to be annulled until a certificate of delivery be returned.

Since writing the above, the Author has been informed, that many excellent regulations respecting the treatment of negro slaves, will be found in an act of the Assembly

sembly of East Florida, whilst a province of Great Britain, which received the Royal approbation. There is no doubt but General Tonyn, late Governor, or Mr. Yates, late Secretary of that Province, would, if properly called on, give satisfactory information on this head.

F I N I S.